

COMMENT

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Hey WPSC: Get The Led Out

by Mike Daly

At last year's CMJ Music Marathon, Lou Reed was among those who took pains to remind college-radio people to use their relative freedom to their best advantage. "You should stop playing some of the shit you've been playing, and stop paying so much attention to trends," Reed said. "You people have access to radio, and you should be doing something and playing something, 'cause I think music can change the world, and I think you should too."

New Jersey's William Paterson College has been seeking for years to win a prized spot on the airwaves. After being rebuffed time and time again by the FCC, their station, WPSC, has finally broken out of the "campus and cable" rut, and now airs on the 88.7 FM frequency.

Those are the years during which we're at our most experimental, especially in terms of music. College stations traditionally have given students their only opportunity to be different, to play the kinds of music they most enjoy. And they have made a difference—few people could have imagined a few years back that R.E.M., U2 and others of that ilk would one day wind up on the Top 40 charts.

Secondly, WPSC exists in a market where we already have three commercial Top 40 stations squeezed within a few megahertz of each other on the FM dial. Because these stations are almost identical in format and playlist, we already have two Top 40 stations too many. Alternative radio stations cover a remarkably wide variety of artists and styles.

College stations can get away with airing political, controversial and other nonmainstream music because they are not hopelessly anchored to the bottom line. So far, WPSC's lone concession to such freedom is a highly popular heavy-metal show—which, predictably, is aired on Sunday nights from 11 p.m. to 2 a.m.

But instead of using their freedom to work toward creating musical and social change, the folks at WPSC have opted for a Top 40 format. As reported in *The Rocker* a few weeks back, station manager Joe Schlip argues that WPSC's largely commercial format and strict playlist teaches the station's staff about the real world of radio.

First of all, who ever confused college with the real world? All those holidays, breaks and extended vacations? All those parties in the frat houses and dorms? It's little wonder that most graduates spend their early professional careers looking back nostalgically on their college days.

In fact, many people I've spoken to recall their days at their college radio stations the most fondly.

and therefore there can never be too many of these stations for those of us who loathe "all the hits, all the time."

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It's a shame when any radio station has the opportunity to create potential new musical trends—or, at least, expose its audience to music not found on the pop record charts—and chooses not to take advantage of it.